THE ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES: A PANACEA FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract
The world is currently faced with various challenges which have become a major drawback in achieving sustainable development across the developing world (Nigeria inclusive). One way to address these challenges is to ensure that countries work towards achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which require a number of stakeholders to intervene if these challenges must be reduced for the benefit of humanity, and one such stakeholder is the library and information sector. This paper uses insights from the Development and Access to Information (DAI) framework to examine and synthesize the contribution of library and information services in achieving SDGs through exploring their contributions to the various economic and social transformation drivers based on MDGs progressive vision statements. It is observed that effective and sustainable management of library and information services will be central to the attainment of all the SDGs as reflected in the MDGs progressive vision statements. The government of Nigeria therefore needs to provide the needed status for this sector and put it on its agenda to usher a new spirit of library and information services professionalism that will go a long way to enhance literacy and enlightenment that is needed if Nigeria is to achieve the SDGs as reflected in the MDGs progressive vision statements plan.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Development and access to Information, Professionalism

Introduction
The success of any country or society rests squarely on the adequacy of its library and information services collections because library and information centres act as agencies for findings, discovery, innovation, vocational skills repository, scholarship and research (Mkumbo, 2016). Information is now regarded as one of the most fundamental rights and requirement for personal and social development, and for citizens’ participation in effective governance (Habermas, 1989 as cited in Britz, 2004). Access to information is a key enabling factor for governments to deliver quality and inclusive services to its people (Ashwill and Norton, 2015). Effective library and information services enhance socioeconomic development by creation of a knowledge society and empowering people, especially marginalised people and those living in poverty to exercise their rights, be economically active, learn new skills, enrich cultural identity and take part in decision making (International Federation for Libraries Association (IFLA), 2013b); and the services are usually supported by the necessary infrastructure, information and communication technology (ICT) and media and information literacy capabilities that people need to effectively use information and preserve them. The term library and information services are used here to refer to activities and services that are
undertaken by public, school, academic and special libraries to manage information resources to ensure access to information and knowledge, provide information literacy skills, ensure lifelong learning, and carry out research and learning development of individuals and the society (Garrido and Fellows, 2017).

According to Abata-Ebire (2018), libraries play an important role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as it is globally considered a centre of research and knowledge generation to empower people and address human challenges. The United Nations 2030 SDGs agenda is an inclusive, integrated framework of 17 goals with a total of 169 targets spanning economic, environmental and social development across the globe (United Nations, 2015). They goals lay out a plan for all countries to actively engage in making the world a better place for people and the planet, and is expected to help member states focus their attention on poverty eradication, climate change, and the development of people. By achieving this agenda, all countries across the globe are expected to have lifted their society out of poverty. Bradley (2016) points out that libraries have an essential role in helping to meet the grand challenge of SDGs by providing access to information, public access to ICT, helping people to develop the capacity to effectively use information, and by preserving information to ensure ongoing access for future generations. Ashwill and Norton (2015) note that access to information is a key enabling right for governments to deliver quality, inclusive services to its people as set out in the SDGs.

One recurring theme in the fight against poverty in Nigeria is the concept of chronic poverty. According to the World Bank (2018), up to 74% of the people living in the Northern parts of Nigeria are living below the national poverty line and are considered to be suffering from chronic poverty. This is significant if we consider that 60% of the population in Nigeria are engaged in subsistence agriculture with women providing almost 76% of the total agricultural labour in the country (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2018). People in chronic poverty are often those who are faced with a host of interlocking problems, have benefited least from economic growth and development, and with few opportunities for accumulation of wealth and escape of poverty. These host of “interlocking problems” may include disability, ill health, abandonment, household break-up, alcohol abuse, theft, few livelihood options, polygamy, remoteness/isolation, and few assets (World Bank, 2016). To address these challenges, IFLA (2018) recognizes the contribution of library and information services to improve outcomes across SDGs. From promoting literacy, to offering free access to information; libraries are safe, welcoming spaces at the heart of communities with a dedicated team who have a deep understanding of local needs; are able to advance digital inclusion through the of use of ICT; and promote innovation, creativity and access to the world’s knowledge for current and future generations (IFLA, 2018).

**Education**

Library and information services are critical in the educational and competency development of a nation through their services and programs like introducing children to the habit and joy of reading, and aiding scholars and researchers in contributing their capabilities through research to promote development. The connection between rural libraries and small-scale economic development must begin with a closer look at the impact of these libraries on their communities in general. Much of the measurable impact demonstrated in capabilities (functional knowledge and skills) have to do with improved literacy practices, the provision of non-formal educational activities, and support of what is often a fledgling reading culture. Dent and Yannotta (2005) note that libraries have a real benefit to users in terms of developing capabilities through providing access to reading materials and literacy program, enhancing academic performance of students and promoting non-formal educational activities. These are demonstrated by the fact that students who use library and information services have measurably higher capabilities of functional knowledge, skills, and resources reflected in class rankings than their counterparts without access to a library and information services.
In a study on local economic development in Uganda and the connection to rural community libraries and literacy, Dent (2007) highlights three key roles that library and information services play in enhancing capabilities through acquisition of functional knowledge and skills in Uganda. These include:

- firstly, by promoting access to education by teaching information skills and providing leadership and expertise in the use of ICT in libraries;
- secondly, by participating in networks that enhance access to resources outside the school or community;
- thirdly, by providing free and equal access to information and ideas across social, cultural, and economic barriers; and
- lastly, by assisting in lifelong learning and promoting functional literacy among adults so that they become responsible citizens.

By supporting education and capabilities development, therefore, effective library and information services support human resource development by imparting business, entrepreneurial, technological and social skills which are all essential for achieving socioeconomic development.

**Information and Communication Technologies**

A decade ago it was dubbed the ‘digital divide’. Now, the gap in ICT between North and South is slowly shrinking. By gaining a foothold in affordable ICTs and developing ICT infrastructure, library and information services make it possible for the poor to use ICT to access information and knowledge services that they need, such as real-time market prices, to boost and improve on their capabilities to improve on their livelihoods. For example, in Uganda, the Maendeleo Foundation with a small grant (up to US$15,000) from EIFL’s Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFLPLIP) in 2010, installed Wi-Fi internet connections and 15 net book computers in five rural libraries serving communities in each of the four regions of Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western Uganda (EIFL, 2012). Working with the Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA), the Makerere University Centres for Lifelong Learning, and the government farm support agencies and farmers’ groups, the Foundation was able to launch a program for developing the capabilities of the communities through free ICT training for farmers, and the creation and packaging of information in local languages. Through the program, the Foundation was able to demonstrate the value of ICT in enhancing agricultural development by inspiring farmers’ groups and library users to contribute to the cost of internet connections; helped farmers petition a government agricultural agency to supply them with disease-resistant coffee plants; enabled farmers to identify new species of trees that they can sell in the community; encouraged young people to take up farming as a career; and linked farmers to new sources of farm supplies and marketing opportunities (EIFL, 2012).

According to a policy document by the Government of Uganda, The Ministry of ICT was established in June 2006 with a mandate of promoting digital inclusion through bridging the digital divide that exist in providing access to online information resources across all sector (Ministry of ICT, 2014). This decision came up as a result of the realization by the government that in today’s connected world, the capabilities and competence to access the internet affects everything from healthcare to quality education and job hunting (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2019). Within these dynamics of operating in the digital world that the Ministry of ICT was set up to achieve. Petuchovaite (2019) points out that the roles of public library becomes critical beyond the value of managing print materials in their stacks to bridging the digital divides and supporting citizens who are stepping into the digital world. Libraries are now assuming new roles of building technology and digital literacy skills in their communities; providing access to e-resources and other online content, and integrating technology into innovative information services. In Nigeria, for example, the examination of the different ICT policies that have been put in place show that the government recognize the potential that public libraries working in an environment of a developed ICT
infrastructure can contribute in the socioeconomic development of the country. These include bridging the digital divide and facilitating information access to all; operationalising e-government services and participating in online digital economy; implementing and promoting national digital literacy initiatives; providing access to e-learning and digitizing educational materials; and digitization and content creation in local languages (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2019).

**Gender equality and women empowerment**

According to Louise and Romero (2017) empowerment as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment involves developing capabilities for making self-decisions regarding education, participation, mobility, economic independence, public speaking, awareness and exercise of rights, political participation and access to information. Jones (2009), posit that community libraries in developing countries can be important sites of information and knowledge exchange and acquisition for women with little or no formal education living in communities characterized by extreme poverty and gender inequities. As locally managed and operated institutions, specific information needs of women identified by community members based on their social context of use shape their mandates, activities, and types of resources they can use to gain gender equality and women empowerment. Libraries offer a “neutral” space where women can safely gather and independently or collectively pursue learning in areas of relevance and interest to them to improve on their competence and capabilities to achieve gender equality and women empowerment (Jones, 2009).

Within the digital divide of access to ICT in a developing country like Nigeria exists another gap: digital divide between boys and girls and between men and women (IFLA, 2012). In rural areas in particular, girls and women are often restricted to traditional roles, and do not have equal access to technologies and technology training. A study done by Beyond Access (2012), however, shows how the introduction of an ICT training program designed to improve the capabilities of female farmers by the National Library of Nigeria and reduce on the digital divide between women and men, have contributed to gender equality and women empowerment. After conducting background research in local communities, the library found that female farmers have many unmet information needs, and would benefit from access to information on weather forecasts, crop prices, and crops planting, particularly in local languages through the ICT training program. As a result, the program has been able to develop the capabilities in form of functional knowledge and skills of women farmers and empower them by increasing their economic well-being through technology skills and helping them set up online markets for their agricultural products (Beyond Access, 2012).

**Environment and natural resources**

Library and information services do a lot more to contribute to a zero waste society than their vision, mission, objectives and other public statements suggest. According to Rowley (2006), many of these contributions emerge naturally as part of their core roles of promoting digital citizenship, knowledge creation, learning and leisure as reflected in capabilities and social context of use. Examples here include firstly “borrowing” where libraries have a natural recycling role through their provision of books, journals, audio-visual materials and other information sources for the use of many people; and secondly, it is very likely that libraries do respond to policies established by their parent and funding bodies in the areas of corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and environmental management based on their social context of use. Edmonds (2005) discusses some of the initiatives being taken by libraries in the London Borough of Haringey in the field of environmental conservation as including purchase of green energy; operating buildings in a more energy efficient way; and installing energy efficient lighting systems when refurbishments are undertaken. Libraries also make a contribution to the environment for their community through the
construction and maintenance of library buildings that act as meeting places for communities, and may play a role in urban regeneration and sustainability projects.

The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of the Republic of Nigeria through the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), has for example, embarked on expanding its readership through a program of setting up Environmental Information Resource Centres in some states in Nigeria (NEMA, 2009). This program has since then through social context of use enabled the dissemination of environmental information to the grass root population to assist in the sustainable use of natural resources. The library has seen a steady growth in the number of users since its establishment due to the fact that environmental issues have gained a lot of importance in recent times both nationally and internationally. Through its work, the Library has been able to develop and maintain a collection of scientific and technical information on the state of environment both nationally and internationally from the social context of use perspective, which have contributed tremendously in analysing trends, assessing problems and promoting activities leading to sustainable development in the field of environment and natural resources conservation (NEMA, 2018).

Climate change

Williams et al. (2016) point out that as long-standing keepers of democracy and information stewardship, library professionals based on their capabilities are a natural fit for advocating and promoting sustainability within their communities. From seed libraries to Occupy Wall Street libraries, library professionals’ view of sustainability extends beyond environmental concerns to include community activism, economic development, and social equity. Empowering people, facilitating dialogue, and providing resources for climate change mitigations and a more resilient future are at the centre of librarians’ vital roles. Further, in a world struggling for sustainability, libraries continue to critically evolve to embrace their communities’ successes and adversities and library associations bring together professionals to co-create solutions, share expertise, and bolster resilience against climate change through learning and community building. Edwards (2005) synthesizes the intentions and objectives of such sustainability-oriented groups against climate change with the three E’s, “concern for the environment, the economy and social equity,” where sustainability is recognized as “a common language that links the central issues confronting our civilization as well as its potential to bring social change values into the mainstream.” As community hubs and centres of change and learning, libraries absorb the shifting environment to co-create spaces and services for a sustainable future.

According to the United Nations (2015), climate change has become the “defining human development challenge of the 21st century while climate stability has been classified as a key “global public good” because it is a good that “benefits all countries”. Equally, access to information and knowledge joins the list of key global public goods where ICTs have become major drivers of economic growth and social development and a climate change mitigation measure; and there are close links between climate change, access to knowledge, and evolutions in ICTs. Kalas and Finlay (2009) highlight ICTs contribution to climate change adaptation strategies through providing access to relevant information, raising awareness at the grassroots level, and facilitating learning and practical knowledge sharing at the community level, while empowering the poor and marginalized to raise their voice for political accountability and concrete action. Some of the concrete examples at grassroots level that demonstrate opportunities to adapt to climate change using ICTs according to Kalas and Finlay (2009) include:-

- informing and raising awareness on the effects of climate change;
- reaching remote villages through information dissemination and enhancing the effectiveness of early-warning systems for disaster prevention and risk reduction;
- identifying, building, documenting and sharing locally rooted and contextualized adaptation strategies and solutions among communities;
facilitating local risk assessments and making communities part of the process to mobilize local knowledge and develop local coping mechanisms;

and creating a repository of information on disaster management and risk mitigation.

Science, technology and innovation

The SDG 2030 agenda calls on all countries to enhance research, upgrade technological capabilities, encourage innovation, and grow the number of research and development workers per one million people, and increase public and private research and development investment (United Nations, 2015). Nigeria has made progress in the area of science, technology and innovation as seen in the number of research and development products and related policy framework including the recent creation of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation to lead in the development and implementations of research, innovation and scientific discovery and inquiry in which the information sector is supposed to play critical roles (NPA, 2007). According to The Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) (2019), it is widely acknowledged that the application of science, technology and innovation increases efficiency of production systems and enhances industrial competitiveness, and that what gives a nation competitive edge in term of capabilities are the speed with which it can identify, utilize and diffuse new information and knowledge through effective performance of the information sector. Therefore, Nigeria must harness science, technology and innovation if socio-economic transformation is to be achieved through increasing access to information on appropriate technologies; assessment of existing information policies and strategies, identifying challenges faced and best practices at local, national and global levels; and putting in place affordable and adaptable ICT tools and services in libraries which are accessible by users, including free and open source library software (UNESCO, 2019).

The SDGs Vision Statement (2015) identifies slow technology adoption and diffusion as a challenge that must be tackled to facilitate implementation of SDGs as reflected in other countries. Some of the issues that it identifies include promoting research and development to promote information and knowledge uptakes, strengthening the intellectual property management system, and establishment and strengthening of science and technology information management systems and services to facilitate knowledge transfer, sharing and exchanges. Other key areas of interventions according to UNESCO (2019), may include developing capacity to identify, gather, assess and usefully disseminate science, technology and innovations information and knowledge; raising information professional standards; developing integrated information action plan; creating innovative knowledge networks among stakeholders - government, educational, professional practitioners, commercial sector, private sector and the civil society; and using ICTs and all information and communication media at local, national, regional, and global levels to advance science, technology and innovation.

Conclusion

Building an ideal nation requires a holistic approach and all facets of human activities and indices of nation building must be taken care of if all SDGs are to be achieved by a developing country like Nigeria. Although this review is non-exhaustive, it has demonstrated that library and information services are vital tool in all forms of human endeavour for the realization of the SDGs as reflected in 2030 agenda. It is the linchpin of national development both as enablers as well as a requirement for achieving SDGs. In order to develop, a country like Nigeria must collect and provide access to adequate and up-to-date “information on gender equality, environment, climate change, and science and technology as reflected by SDGs vision statement if socio-economic transformation is to take place. It is therefore imperative that all efforts must be put in establishing effective library and information services for the proper management, provision, and dissemination of information and in ensuring that these services must function beyond conventional practices to achieve greater impact in moving towards achieving the SDGs as reflected in Nigeria through...
The Role Of Library And Information Centres: A Panacea For The Achievement Of Millenium Development Goals In Education

collaboration with other organizations, institutions and professional bodies at local, national and global level.

The SDGs as reflected in a customized Nigerian vision 2030 are a universal agenda for transforming countries across the globe, and to achieve this transformation, we must rethink the approaches that have left Nigerian libraries out of national planning, implementation, and decision making, and monitoring process. These would include among others developing existing and funded network of library and information infrastructure and services that reach the local, institutional, national and international level and which can be used to deliver programmes including government programmes in hard-to-reach places; developing capabilities through enhanced skills and resources to help achieve universal literacy; developing public access to ICT facilities and infrastructure to supports digital inclusion for all levels in the country; putting in place appropriate library and information services regulatory and policy environment; and promoting gender equality in library and information services policy making and decision support if the SDGs goals are to be achieved.

Recommendations
- The Government of the day should ensure that libraries and information centres are fully integrated in the scheme of activities at both the local and international level.
- Library and information centres should regularly organize seminars, workshops, symposium that will serve as an educational forum where citizens irrespective of gender, age, and profession can listen to information on social, economic, health, agriculture and education to enable them develop and sustained themselves in line with the goals of SDGs.
- The government and the parent institution should support the library and information centres financially in order to solve some of the challenges like inadequate infrastructure and facilities, poor network distribution and publishing of research work/findings conducted by researchers.
- Adequate staffing with professional qualification needed so that they will give quality contributions to national development in spheres of life.

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